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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PRA

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TAGS: MARR MNUC PARM FR
SUBJECT: GENERAL OBERING'S MARCH 16 MISSILE DEFENSE
DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary: MOD and MFA officials welcomed briefings by Missile Defense Agency (MDA) Director LT. General Obering on March 16. The MOD was primarily in a listening mode, raising only a few key questions. General Obering stressed that: 1) the Iranian ICBM, IRBM, SRBM threat is real, growing and may be non-deterable; 2) the European site will defend against longer-range threats and can compliment NATO's Missile Defense efforts; 3) the Missile Defense System has completed numerous flight tests, which proves that the missile defense system works; and, 4) the U.S. has and will continue to engage with Russia. We will continue to be transparent with NATO and Russia, Obering emphasized. MFA Director for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre agreed with U.S. assessments of the threat from Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere, and expressed support for the right of the United States to defend itself with MD. Carre was noncommittal, however, on General Obering's offer for the U.S. to work with French experts and industry. He said France needed time to study our MD program more closely, adding that regardless of who wins the French Presidential elections, the new French administration likely would seek a review of France's security policies. U.S. presentations on MD could be factored into the review.

¶2. (C) Carre saw a need for the U.S. and Europe to manage carefully public diplomacy on MD, given clear Russian and Chinese misperceptions about the U.S. MD program, especially if the U.S. were seriously considering deployment of a radar site in the Caucasus - a move Carre thought was unwise as it would only aggravate the Russians. Carre was relieved to hear from General Obering that the U.S. was considering discussions with the Chinese, as the Chinese had told the French they believed that the U.S. MD program was directed at China.

¶3. (C) In a reference to France's own nuclear defense policy, Carre noted France thought MD could only complement, and not be a substitute for, deterrence. Carre's most serious objections centered on the eventual linkage between the U.S. MD program with ongoing MD discussions at NATO. France recognized that ultimately NATO would develop an MD program, but for now advised the U.S. not to focus publicly on the linkage between the two programs to avoid public splits among Allies. End Summary.

¶ 14. (C) MFA Director for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre welcomed General Obering by observing that France has been "thinking deeply" about missile defense and therefore had appreciated U/S Edelman's offer in the fall of 2006 to brief on the U.S. approach. Carre was accompanied by his deputy Francois Richier, MFA desk officer for missile defense Arnaud Mentre, and Navy Commander de Coriolis, representing the office of the military advisor to the President at the Elysee.

¶ 15. (C) Following General Obering's thorough presentation on the Iranian missile threat, which he suggested may be non-deterable, as well as on the effectiveness of the U.S. missile defense program, Carre said France would have no public comments on the U.S. MD program, which it viewed as a bilateral effort with the Czech Republic and Poland. France, he added, did not believe that missile defense would become a substitute for deterrence, but could understand its use as a complement to deterrence. In any case, France accepted missile defense as a reality, in part because MD is not adequately covered by nonproliferation treaties, such as the NPT.

¶ 16. (C) Carre voiced concerns pertaining to Russia, China, and the linkage between the U.S.'s and NATO's MD programs. Volunteering that the Russians would always find ways to be difficult, and agreeing with General Obering that the Russians had been amply briefed, Carre nonetheless cautioned that it would be important to properly manage Russian objections and misperceptions, especially if the U.S. envisioned placing a radar site in the Caucasus region, which France believes Russia would find unacceptable. General Obering clarified this last point by noting that an

additional site could be placed closer to the Iranian threat. Obering also added that the U.S. has and will be transparent with NATO and Russia.

¶ 17. (C) In terms of NATO's own MD program, Carre noted that much work had been done at tactical levels, but no final decisions had been taken on a program at Brussels. France was satisfied with the current state of debate at NATO, he added. In response to Carre's questions, General Obering explained that the U.S. MD program had been designed to be compatible with NATO's own system. A linkage between the two programs was possible, he added. Carre said that NATO would ultimately develop its own MD program, but he advised General Obering against highlighting the likely linkages between the two programs so as better to avoid the creation of divisions among NATO allies. (Note: In a subsequent meeting with the MFA desk officer following MD, he noted that given that NATO's program has not yet reached the same levels of development as that of the U.S., less public debate on NATO's program at this time would help to calm Russian objections to NATO activities on its borders. End note.)

¶ 18. (C) Turning to China, Carre informed General Obering that the Chinese had conveyed to France their belief that the U.S. MD program was directed at China. General Obering stated that the U.S. program was not aimed at China but was intended for the defense of the U.S., while providing a security umbrella for most of its allies in Europe.

No Immediate Reaction to Cooperation Offer

¶ 19. (C) Carre had no immediate response to General Obering's offer to work with France on MD. General Obering said the U.S. valued French official and industry expertise in companies such as Thales and EADS. The U.S. also would be interested in the use of the French test site in Bordeaux.

MOD Thinking on U.S. Missile Defense

¶ 10. (C) Following introductory remarks by the MOD Deputy

Director for Strategic Affairs Admiral Saint Salvy, Robert Ranquet, Engineer-General and advisor to Saint Salvy, welcomed General Obering's presentation, but offered that France "was not ready to engage in such a program," as it prefers to contain threats through nuclear deterrence. Additionally, he emphasized that France accepts the U.S. right to develop its MD program. Also present at the meeting from the French side were Major General of the Marines Jean-Paul Faugre, Air Force Brigadier General Hendel Hugues, and Col. Denis Milliot, head of the North American desk at the MOD.

¶11. (C) Ranquet indicated the MOD was "puzzled about MD," because its preliminary assessment was that the Missile Defense System was designed to counter a long-range threat, but "would have limited impact to destroy shorter-range missiles aimed at Paris or London." Second, he said the MOD would welcome more information on how missile defense would relate to NATO's program, as it was not clear whether the U.S. viewed its MD program as a part of or a substitute for NATO's own MD program. He then wondered whether the Russians would be even less willing to accept a missile defense system that was part of NATO, given their suspicious attitudes toward the Alliance.

¶13. (C) Expanding on his presentation, General Obering offered that MD would indeed protect Europe as well as the U.S. and at Ranquet's request, promised more technical discussions in the future, adding that he would be briefing the NAC on April 19 on just this question. In terms of MD's place in NATO, Obering explained that the U.S. had invested \$100 billion in MD since 1983 "and it would not be fruitful for NATO to duplicate these expenses." He added that there would nonetheless exist useful synergies with NATO and MD's command and control would be streamlined with NATO systems.

¶14. (C) Lastly, Ranquet said that while the MOD did not understand Russia's aggressive response to the prospect of missile defense and found Russia's means of communicating its displeasure "unacceptable," but there clearly is a lack of understanding -- both in Russia and among European publics. He urged more diplomatic exchanges to counter

misapprehensions and applauded Obering's trip as a good start.

¶15. (U) This message was cleared by General Obering's office.

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